

# Types of audience response From tear-jerkers to thought-provokers

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Discussions of film, from conversations and journalistic reviews to deeply analytic studies of individual films or portions of a film, almost always involve assumptions—implicit or explicit—about audience response. Even the most formalistic or stylistic analysis, which assumes it is operating only on an aesthetic level, or which assumes it is “purely descriptive” begins to make implicit concepts of audience response part of its analysis once it moves to any degree of generalization. To take a simple example, to label a film, or film segment, “comic” is to make an assumption about its effect on the audience.

Recently two currents of thought have brought the question of audience response to the center of film discussion. One current has been from filmmakers and films, particularly Jean-Luc Godard and other didactic filmmakers plus the experimentalists such as the New American Cinema. Their impact in the late 60s has been to cause a serious reexamination of film criticism, particularly on the Continent, and now in England and the Americas, with critics turning to structuralism, semiology, marxism, and other new or previously unconsidered methodologies to deal with films which seem to have stretched the dominant concepts of what makes a film (narrative, organic use of sound and image, etc.).

The second influence on the question of audience response is the fact that the nature of the film audience has been, drastically changed by changing social forces (obviously an influence on Godard, too). On the one hand, in the early 60s social commentators such as Daniel Bell could proclaim an “end to ideology” in the advanced capitalist countries. However, the social-political upheaval within the presumably homogeneous societies of the West and militant nationalism in the

Third World demonstrated that deep power and ideological conflicts remained in society, which are also expressed in social products such as film.

Clearly the two previous paragraphs could each deserve extended discussion. But I wish to pose them as useful generalizations (not truisms) for the moment, in order to provide a simple background for a consideration of audience response, and the closely related question of aesthetic distance. My aim is to present a useful paradigm for further discussion of audience response, since it seems more and more apparent from film criticism, and journalistic reviews, and post-viewing comments (and sometimes during viewing) that we do not have a practical vocabulary to discuss what we mean in this area.

To some extent the failure to develop such a critical apparatus can be laid to the long reign of personalistic and impressionistic film criticism which made no pretensions to being scientific or rational. It was, rather proudly, literary. Yet the understandable reaction to that trend focused either on internal film history or an internal aesthetic approach of formalism—"film as art," or "film as film." Both the historic and aesthetic approach have revealed themselves as having serious drawbacks, which have been most evident in the critic's last step, evaluation. Film students who have become quite used to raising eyebrows or smirking at the dated and/or cranky evaluations of impressionistic critics of the past, have now begun to question the actual worth of films which are historically important for technical or other non-aesthetic reasons. And younger people have also begun to question the basis of evaluation by aesthetic critics. (Two simple examples are the amusement people in the United States feel at finding French film intellectuals enamored of Jerry Lewis, and British critics adoring of Douglas Sirk.)

The need for a critical consideration of audience response becomes increasingly more obvious. Many recent films have deliberately catered to specific audiences such as disenchanted youth and blacks. As film companies have discovered that the film audience is no longer the "everyone" of the 30s and 40s, they have begun to find many audiences. Yet this commercially motivated pluralism does not run as fast as the audience, as for example feminists hiss at gross sexism in movies and dissect it in reviews and articles. What teacher of film history can show *BIRTH OF A NATION* even to an all-white audience without a preamble about Griffith's racism? Films too are becoming more sophisticated in dealing with their own conventions. Since *HIGH NOON*, the western, once thought to be a completely formulaic genre, has developed beyond the psychological western into the anti-western (*DOC*) and the logical extension of violence (Sergio Leone's films) and, according to some, even beyond its own limits to becoming something completely different (*EL TOPO*) for which old concepts cannot be stretched. Clearly with

such films we can no longer speak of audience response (or not speak of it as when normative assumptions are generally shared) in the simple way we can (or previously could) with a John Ford western.

Actually, the matter of audience response is not a new question in the field of aesthetics, though it has been rather neglected. Both Plato and Aristotle, as fathers of Western aesthetics, were engaged with the question. Indeed, for Aristotle it became a cornerstone of his definition of tragedy when he stated serious drama had a cathartic effect. More usually in modern philosophy, the question has been phrased in terms of the relation of subject and object. In the case of film, the projected image and sound are the object, and the viewer-listener is the subject. Our common vocabulary reflects this concept: “objective” and “subjective.”

Since a discussion of audience response cannot consider the subject alone, but must include the object, that is the film as stimulus for the response in the subject, we must talk of two different orders or categories simultaneously when we speak of the subject/object relation. One applies to the audience and the other to the film. This complicates matters, and is often the source of descriptive confusion. For example, the statement, “That film was complex (or sophisticated, or multi-leveled, or racist, or sexist, etc.),” is often meant to describe two different orders or even both of them. It can mean, “That film in and of itself was complex as evidenced by my reaction to it.” It is semantically difficult to say that a film object is sexist and racist per se, yet only the perversely obtuse would not understand the statement, “BIRTH OF A NATION is a racist movie.”

Clearly there are dangers in making the initial statement and meaning the last, for clarity is reduced. This is most obvious when someone else responds negatively, “No, that film was simple” (meaning, “That film in and of itself was simple as evidenced by my reaction to it.”) At this point, most film criticism simply becomes a rhetorical battle attempting persuasion or maximum intimidation of the opponent. For this reason most film criticism is remarkably well written from the point of view of argumentation. But it suffers from a nearly total non-concern with logic or fidelity to the initial points.

That sounds like a put-down, but I think it must also be understood as reflecting the possibility that we may never be able to separate subject and object in film study. We may be always subjective and stuck with our own uncertainty principle that decrees we are *always* contaminated subjects with our own prejudices, histories, visual and aesthetic education, and so forth. Thus we can never attain a true objectivity, but only make approximations and clearly delineate who we are to others before commencing our “reading” of a film text. The critic and the audience must always be subjective, for that is their role. But the fact

that we are subjective does not preclude our analyzing the process which contains our subjectivity. In Gregory Bateson's terms, film theory is not criticism, but meta-criticism, and it is only by stepping outside of the process of criticism and into theory that we can understand that process.

## CATEGORIES OF AUDIENCE RESPONSE

To start with we have two things, the film and the response. Let us start with the elementary division of both into simple and complex (or naive and sophisticated, if you prefer). (Bear with the following gross generalization for a bit; it is to make a point.) A "simple" film, I will say, presents a rather clear content in a rather clear form. For an example I will take the stereotyped western. The content is a basic romance/melodrama, the form is elementary film narrative. Now a simple response would be to simply and easily assimilate the content through the form ... to "believe" the story and the attitudes presented (e.g. good triumphs over evil; Caucasian intruders are superior to the native American Indians). Such a simple film, though, may also receive a complex response either through the content not being assimilated (resentment of the racism) or the form being irritating or both. (1) I will take a micro example from the western: that if the falls off of horses are "fakey," they are noticed and momentarily disturb narrative flow.(2)

Before moving on to the complex film, let us construct an intermediate film, or a variant on the simple film. This would be the film that we can call "compound"—that is, it relies on what one's knowledge of simple films is and plays off of their conventions. An example could be the psychological western (HIGH NOON) or more clearly, the anti-western. The anti-western attacks the cherished myths of the stereotyped western to make its point: the marshal is a drunk/dope addict/corrupt/sexually deviant or depraved, etc. Again we can have a simple response: to accept the message (that no one is perfect). Or we can have a complex response, seeing the message but comparing it with the old convention and then viewing it critically and emerging with a more sophisticated message (that the old myth was wrong, indeed that it was probably socially destructive). This can easily be referred by the viewer to a larger context, as is frequently the case with the compound war movie. Set in WW1 (JOHNNY GOT HIS GUN) or WW2 (CATCH-22) or Korea (M\*A\*S\*H) or the Cold War (DR. STRANGELOVE), the film seems to be a comment on current war as well.

This has only considered content. A film can also follow the basic content of a genre and play off the usual form (BONNIE AND CLYDE) and be compound and elicit a simple response (It's pretty) or a complex one (See the mountainous criticism of it by journalist reviewers, particularly on the "aesthetics" of violence). Or a compound film can play with both form and content. It may even be a compound hybrid, such as Godard's ALPHAVILLE, a science fiction-gangster-

philosophical-film playing with changes on both form and content.

At last then we can get to the complex film, in which the film itself either forces self-reflection on itself as film (much as poetry does with Byronic irony or the theater did with Pirandello forcing the audience to see that the play is a play). My example of this type of film will be Jean-Marie Straub's OTHON. Or in a more Brechtian vein the film can be not merely self-reflective but self-critical in a larger context ... making explicit its ideological basis to the audience. This is what Godard-Gorin are into. In WIND FROM THE EAST the visual track shows a "scene" from a western, yet it is compound because it is obviously fake (one character is reading a book) and it is complex because the sound track is commenting on westerns. Thus with the self-reflective film or self-critical film, the idea of a simple or naive response is simply impossible. In fact this is the great formal achievement of Straub and Godard-Gorin: to have discovered a method of totally inhibiting simple response.

We are still not done with our categories. Thus far I have postulated a simple response, or a complex response, of three types (to form, to content, and to form and content). Each of these responses can be further subdivided. First, we can divide them as being either emotional or intellectual, or both. This is a somewhat artificial division, but useful for conceptual purposes. I would argue that an audience *always* has an emotional *and* intellectual response to a film. The emotional response can be subdivided into the unconscious and the conscious. In the intellectual category of response, it should be apparent that such a response is contaminated by ideology, and is historical in nature. There is no such thing as a "pure aesthetic" response. Much more can be said about emotional and intellectual response, but that discussion will be postponed for my purposes here.

## CONVENTION

The filmmaker takes one set of signs and signals which are usually thought of as film conventions. These are arranged in the film, thereby establishing a code. This code, in turn, is recognized by the audience as equivalent to or homologous with the signs and signals of a different code. This second code is the one which is their own perception of the world, the prevailing semantic code. Now by changing or manipulating either code from the accepted norm, a distortion is produced—the appearance of things *not* being manipulated is called into question.

If the film code is obviously changed, we have self-reflective film: film commenting on its own nature as film. A simple example is provided by LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD in its initial release in the early 60s in the United States. With disrupted narrative, constant change of costume, and montage-type editing, the film was not easily comprehensible by foreign film audiences (mostly college students and college-educated) since they were unfamiliar with the technique. They didn't know the

conventions the film was using. Those who did understand the film enjoyed the cinematic “tricks” and thus had a complex response. However, the film no longer has the same effect, in large part due to the visual education of television after the mid-60s, which increasingly used montage editing in commercials (soft drink commercials are particularly notable here, also Alka-Seltzer commercials) which visually educated millions to a new convention. That is, the prevailing semantic code changed and caught up with the original filmic code. Our response to an Alka-Seltzer commercial is rarely complex, as it was with *MARIENBAD*. Semantic codes in the audience are always changing, and as result, when a filmic code is no longer part of one’s current semantic baggage, it seems a cliché when seen. (Most obviously, what director would now show the passage of time with the blowing leaves of a calendar?)

Godard surprised the world with the jump cuts in *BREATHLESS*, but by now they have become sufficiently natural to go unnoticed, which is one of Godard’s own points about the devastating effects on our minds for us to accept images as “natural” and not subject to deliberate human change. *BREATHLESS* made audiences aware of editing and thus elicited a complex response.

#### PARADIGM SUMMARY: CATEGORIES OF AUDIENCE RESPONSE IN FILM

A. The object, film, is *simple*.

- The subject, audience response, may be simple or complex.
- If complex, it may be so in relation to—form,—content, or—both form and content.

B. The object, film, is *compound*.

- The subject, audience response, may be simple or complex.
- If complex, it may be so in relation to—form,—content, or—both form and content.

C. The object, film, is complex in a *self-reflective* way.

- The subject, audience response, may be simple or complex.
- If complex, it may be so in relation to—form,—content, or—both form and content.

D. The object, film, is complex in a *self-critical* way.

- The subject, audience response, may be simple or complex.
- If complex, it may be so in relation to—form,—content, or—both form and content.

Each audience response can also, then, be subdivided.

- It can be *emotional* in a—conscious or—unconscious way,
- or it can be *intellectual*.

#### OTHON AS A SELF-REFLECTIVE FILM

Straub's OTHON (discussed at length in Martin Walsh's article on Straub in this issue) is basically about aesthetic distance. Distance is created in it in several ways. The film is a transfer from one medium to another. Actually we have three "Othons" : a literary text (a drama written by Pierre Corneille); a theatrical play (even though it has never been performed since 1708); and a film. The setting is one the means of creating distance. The story is set in ancient Rome, yet was written not as an accurate period piece, but as a French neoclassic tragedy and is thus ancient Rome viewed through Corneille's mind. We can call this second Rome, the stage Rome. Straub takes it one step further by filming in modern Rome, with the sight and sound of auto traffic intruding from time to time, and shooting with the present day weathering and ruin of older buildings (some ancient, some Renaissance or post-Renaissance).

Distance is also created by different styles of acting, and language. Of course, ancient Romans spoke Latin, and Corneille wrote in classical French (in verse). Using Italian actors, Straub emphasizes or draws attention to all this by having them speak the French with distinctly noticeable accents. Since French poetry functions on syllabic rather than metric beat, and an Italian speaker of French tends to introduce a certain beat or singsong, due to the structural characteristics of Italian the effect is—depending upon the actor's facility with a French accent—another level of distancing. When subtitles are added for an English or German audience, the effect is compounded. Related to this is acting style. The dominant style is the very rapidly spoken, running on of the French, often missing the caesuras and rhymes that give neoclassic French verse a subjectively felt "majesty."

Straub's reason, for this might be quite simply to squeeze the text into x minutes of film, which is a directorial comment on Corneille's *Othon* and its existence as a cultural artifact. Straub does not attempt "fidelity" to tradition (exemplified, say, in a Comedie Française performance), but he does not edit the text. By stressing literal fidelity to the expense of the spirit, he comments on both. While the delivery of some lines is very rapid and done with virtually no affect (non-verbal expression) by the actor or actress, other actors and actresses are given free rein to give facial and body interpretation. Again the result is an implicit commentary developed through contrast. Thus neoclassic dramatic "rules," such as all the action taking place in an unspecific antechamber, are broken (as is the usual prohibition on characters sitting) with the location shifting (to unspecific but outdoor sets). Finally, the camera itself at times seems stuck on extremely long frame situations, yet breaks at one point to move along with (behind) two characters taking a long walk. There seems no logic to the use of the camera for it is not constant.

What is OTHON about then? Basically, I think it is a film about film as a



medium, the familiar art-commenting-on-itself syndrome of the 20th century. Yet it is not simply self-reflective on itself. The effect is to comment on the transfer of material from one medium to another: actual event, historically rendered event, creative dramatic text, performance of that text, pro-filmic (in front of the camera) performance, and film. In this it raises the question of the use of Corneille, the function of literature and film, the meaning of artistic meaning, the uses of history and of classics. Corneille's great theme in all his works is the conflict of individual love and state power, usually detailed with marriage or proposed marriage as mediator of the two. OTHON is no exception, and the tragedy is that individual fulfillment is never attainable, much like Freud's thesis in *Civilization and its Discontents* that progress is purchased at the price of denying immediate gratification. In this sense a more philosophic meaning can be derived from Straub's OTHON. It can be fitted into the *nouveau roman* and other artistic currents of post-WWII French thought: that the film is about the absence of people, about their non-participation in life.

I have chosen OTHON as an example of the self-reflective complex film because it has been seen by the French cinematic left as an explicitly political film in form. Currently it is held up in France as an example of the political "deconstruction" that progressive film should emulate. I do not see OTHON in that way. I believe there are three main reasons the French can see OTHON as a "deconstructed" film, a self-critical film, while we can only see it as a self-reflective film (and within the limits of bourgeois ideology):

(1) In France the educational and cultural system has an extreme veneration of the "classics" such as Corneille. Thus an attack on the sacredness of a classic text is a liberating and political act in France. The Anglo-American tradition, in contrast, has not venerated its "masters" in the same way. Literary burlesque is an old tradition in our culture, and Shakespeare, to make a parallel figure to Corneille, has been altered all along. The 18th century wrote "happy" endings for the tragedies, the Victorian age Bowdlerized the Bard, and production has always been free (e.g., Orson Wells, Peter Brook, Charles Marowitz) and only mildly controversial.

(2) In drawing on two different philosophies and methodologies, the French cinematic left has introduced an unnoticed contradiction. On the one hand, *Cahiers du cinéma* in particular is heavily indebted to Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, neither of whom are Marxists. On the other hand, the *Cahiers* editors consider themselves Marxists with a heavy debt to Louis Althusser. The two are not harmoniously reconcilable. This odd amalgam has allowed them to detach form from content for conceptual purposes, and also for active criticism of films.



(3) The French cinematic left seems unable to separate film as an object from its creator's intentions and from its critical reception in order to see it for what it is. This is particularly evident in the essay by Jean Narboni, "La vicariance du pouvoir" (*Cahiers du cinéma*, 224), which established OTHON as a truly radical, self-critical film. In reading the article, one is struck at how Narboni takes Straub's reputation as a political filmmaker, and Straub's statements in interviews in this and the proceeding issue of *Cahiers* on OTHON, as sufficient proof that the film is materialist and radically goes beyond bourgeois ideology. Additionally, Narboni seems motivated to defend OTHON in large measure because it was attacked as petty-bourgeois avant-gardism by French Communist Party intellectuals. Interestingly enough, when *Cinéthique* published a double issue (9/10) on their collective theoretical basis, they heavily attacked Barthes. Yet they still held to OTHON as a self-critical film, without apparently noticing the contradiction, since Narboni's article explicitly relies heavily on Barthes' ideas.

A similar confusion is evidenced in *Cahiers* editor Jean-Louis Comolli's co-authored study of recent U.S. jazz, *Free Jazz/Black Power*. Comolli manages to compare the growth of the political Black Power movement with the development of "Free Jazz" (as exemplified by John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp, etc.) and concludes that the music is the direct artistic expression of the political movement. His only substantive support are quotes from Shepp about black liberation, and titles of instrumental music such as "Liberation" and "For Malcolm X."

It is easy enough to ridicule more than just the methodological flaws of this effect by pointing out that the audience for such music is overwhelmingly white, that the majority of black Americans are completely unfamiliar with it and most of the remainder do not like it. However there is another element of Comolli's naïveté which is interesting in its relation to *Cahiers* analysis of form. Obviously instrumental music is all form and no content. *If* one could find ideology in a work of pure form, then one could find ideology in a work of both form and content, such as film, in separating the form. And then one could assert, as Comolli and Narboni do, that there is a category of films in which "the content is not explicitly political, but in some way becomes so through the criticism practiced on it through its form." (Their examples are *MEDITERRANÉE*, *THE BELLBOY*, and *PERSONA*.)<sup>(3)</sup> And then one could make such an assertion with some basis. Unfortunately, they have only made the claim and never demonstrated it, neither in music or in film. In the absence of any concrete thought on their part, I can only be skeptical of their assertion.

## THE SELF-CRITICAL FILM

The self-reflective film such as OTHON questions its own filmic form and thereby produces knowledge about film; the self-critical film goes a

step further, criticizes its form *and* content, and thereby criticizes itself, its audience, and its audience's world. As Julia Lesage explains in her article on *WIND FROM THE EAST* in this issue, the self-critical type of film examines film internally, and also externally as a social and political activity.

Both types of complex films—self-reflective and self-critical—clearly stand opposed to conventional cinema. Conventional film rests firmly on the foundation of mimesis: the imitation of, or aesthetic representation of, the real world. In pursuing its aim of giving an impression of reality—of being a “window on the world” or a mirror of that world—conventional cinema hides its means. It deliberately intends to seem natural or innocent. We could call conventional cinema “rhetorical” in that it uses its form to persuade (the traditional form of rhetoric). Rhetorical cinema wears a mask and convinces by manipulating the spectator. Thus the typical devices of rhetorical cinema (deep focus-cinematography, natural lighting and color, conventional acting, the camera's following the action, etc.) act on the audience to elicit a close identification with the screen action. In contrast, self-reflective and self-critical films, rather than being an invitation to empathetic participation, force the spectator to an active intellectual reaction.

Clearly, this implies a completely different set of values: success is not measured in moving people to tears, laughter, horror, suspense, or admiration, but rather in achieving a critical and aware spectator. While the tendency of conventional cinema, is to show the status quo—the world outside the window—as normal and natural (even when deplorable), the tendency of complex cinema is to expose the world (including cinema) to an actively critical scrutiny. Further, complex film critiques the rhetorical figures of conventional cinema, exposing the latter's implicit censorship.

While the self-reflective film assaults the easy identification of conventional cinema, it does not necessarily raise questions beyond the internal nature of film.<sup>(4)</sup> For example, many experimental films of the last decade are self-reflective and explore the medium's characteristics (time/editing; pattern; light; etc.) without reference to anything extra-filmic. On the other hand, the self-critical film goes beyond this to expose its own form, criticize its content, and its own social function. For example, *WIND FROM THE EAST* constantly interrogates itself (and its audience), finally raising unavoidable questions about film as a political activity, and about political action in general.

To date the best known examples of self-critical film are the Godard-Gorin “Dziga Vertov Group” collaborations. In and of themselves, these films seem limited and are vulnerable to charges of intellectualism, formalism, and elitism. But to see the Godard-Gorin films, or ones like

them, only in and of themselves, or to think that one must totally agree with Godard and Gorin in order to understand the films, is to miss the point. Their real importance has been twofold. First, as filmic polemics they have attacked the simplistically conventional cinema, exposing the presumed innocence of rhetorical cinema. Secondly, in an historical context, they have been early experiments in breaking with the dominant cinema and pointing towards a future political film art.

Behind the motive of self-critical films lies a larger question, and one that is implicit, if not explicit, in the various discussions of self-critical films: this is the question of ideology. If it is taken that the dominant ideology (that of the bourgeoisie as the dominant class) is one of the significant means of political and social control of other classes, then it must be accepted that it is important to struggle against the dominant ideology. On that realist and non-realist radical filmmakers would agree; the point of difference is *how* to carry on that struggle. Realists argue for the effectiveness of clearly understandable narrative form that appeals to a wide audience, and against the obscurity of anti-realists and their limited audience. Anti-realists argue that realist form itself cannot question deeply enough. Godard and Gorin have defended themselves on the question of audience size by claiming they were intentionally making films for small audiences of political militants.

The conventional realistic film presents society as reality, *the* reality, not *a* reality. And the obvious questions to ask of this kind of film are: What parts of society does it choose to present? What does it choose to hide? What does it take as normal? Using the same realistic form, a realistic film which is unconventional in being politically conscious and progressive, presents society in order to critique it, but it too hides its own nature. For example, it usually presents an individual protagonist, and it views him or her with an omniscient point of view that itself contains a political stance. As Colin McCabe has recently argued, such a film can oppose the dominant ideological norms of the time:

“Within contemporary films one could think of the films of Costa-Gavras or such television documentaries as *CATHY COME HOME*. What is, however, still impossible for the classic realist text [i.e., film—CK] is to offer any perspectives for struggle due to its inability to investigate [as opposed to merely present—CK] contradiction. It is thus not surprising that these films tend either to be linked to a social democratic conception of progress—if we reveal injustices then they will go away—or certain *ouvrieriste* tendencies which tend to see the working class, outside of any dialectical movement, as the simple possessors of truth.”

(5)

The politically progressive realistic film is just as rhetorical as the conventional one but for a different end.

The self-critical film (which could be called the self-reflective film plus a

didactic intent, content, and effect), critiques society and itself by exposing, the truths behind social appearances, and the physical materiality and social function of film, including itself as film. One reason why such films are confusing or off-putting is that they are less like drama and novels, and more like essays and polemics. That is, they are resolutely didactic. The question that comes up is: “Is this worth doing?” The answer in the short run is yes, if it be realized that such films to date are not ends in themselves. They are not final answers, but they are asking the right questions about radical film form and radical film content. In the longer term, history will decide the question. And in this context two films seem to me to significantly advance the practice of self-critical films. Jon Jost’s new film, *SPEAKING DIRECTLY*, and the Godard-Gorin *TOUT VA BIEN*, are inconceivable without the directors’ previous films, and they are also readily understandable to a very large part of the film audience. These second generation self-critical films synthesize lessons learned from their makers’ earlier experimental films with a clearer, more sophisticated, and more compassionate radical politics. In so doing, they transcend the negative critique of conventional cinema, which was the major accomplishment of films like *WIND FROM THE EAST*, and begin the positive fulfillment of a self-critical cinema’s potential.

## Notes

1. Even with Straub’s *OTHON*, a deliberate attempt to produce a totally irritating (or distracting) form, audiences find themselves, if they can endure, drawn into “learning” the form. That is, it is hard to conceive of a film that is constantly and repeatedly psychologically irritating on the level of form. Perhaps constant physiological irritation is possible since apparently certain cycles of stroboscopic light elicit discomfiting physiological response.

2. Yet even to get this far in dividing things up has already created problems. Who really believes a western? (or in what way do we believe it, or does our hypothetical simple viewer believe it?) And how did we decide that a western was simple to begin with? These are completely valid questions. For not stopping to answer them here, I can only confess that what I am attempting is at such a primitive and textbook level because no one has ever systematically dealt with it before that I am reduced to such inanities to make progress. (For consolation, though, consider that film criticism faces these problems but is only ‘decades old, yet drama analysis has never done better in facing them and is centuries old.)

3. “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” *Cahiers du cinéma*, nos. 216, 217. Translated in *Screen*, Summer 1971.

4. For my purposes here it should be clear that the category “self-reflective” is exclusively a formal one. For me, *OTHON* is *mostly* self-

reflective rather than self-critical, but others would place it in the second category. Michael Snow's WAVELENGTH could be considered partly self-critical in that it presents and comments on a melodramatic situation, but it is *mostly* about film as a film.

5. "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen* 15:2 (Summer 1974), p. 16.

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